

A Byzantine Grand Embassy to Russia in 1400

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The *Acta Patriarchatus Constantinopolitani*, published by Miklosich and Müller, contain a *pittakion* sent by Matthew I, Patriarch of Constantinople (1397–1410), to his subordinate and representative in Moscow, Cyprian, Metropolitan of Kiev and All Russia.¹ The document is undated, but it is clear from the contents that it was written either in the last three weeks of December 1399 or, more probably, in 1400.² Its professed aim was to persuade the Russian primate to embark on a fund-raising campaign in aid of Constantinople, besieged by the forces of the Ottoman Sultan, Bayazid I.³ This *pittakion* has often

1. *Acta Patriarchatus Constantinopolitani*, ed. F. Miklosich and J. Müller, II (Vienna, 1862), pp. 359–61 [cited hereafter as *MM*]. For a definition of a *pittakion*, see J. Darrouzès, *Le Registre synodal du patriarchat byzantin au XIV^e siècle. Etude paléographique et diplomatique* (Paris, 1971), pp. 172–81. Cf. idem, *Recherches sur les ὁφίκια de l'Eglise byzantine* (Paris, 1970), pp. 90, 160 n. 2, 181 n. 3, 221, 338 n. 5, 357, 366, 389, 398, 454, 495 n. 1, 553, 568.

2. Among recent events alluded to by the Patriarch are the reconciliation of the Emperors Manuel II and John VII (early December 1399), Manuel's departure from Constantinople on his aid-seeking tour of western Europe (10 December 1399) and John's simultaneous assumption of imperial authority in Byzantium. The Patriarch's additional statement that John VII 'has undertaken the struggle against the unbelievers and attends to all matters concerning the guarding and safety of the city and of the Christians' would seem to reflect the situation as it was early in 1400, when John's plans for the defence of Constantinople against Bayazid's forces had time to mature.

3. *Χρεία οὖν ἡμῖν ἐξόδου καὶ ἀναλωμάτων πολλῶν πρὸς φυλακὴν ἡμετέραν*: *MM*, II, p. 360. There is no question in this letter of seeking military aid from

been used by students of late Byzantine history;⁴ yet it is still capable of yielding new material to the historian. The purpose of this article is to identify this material and to comment briefly upon it.

The Patriarch begins by reminding Cyprian that the Emperor Manuel II and he himself 'wrote and sent emissaries (ἀποκρισιάρχους) some time previously (πρὸ καιροῦ) to Your Reverence and to my most noble son, the most glorious grand prince of All Russia (μέγαν ῥῆγαν πάσης Ῥωσίας) and the other princes (ῥηγάδας) in order that, according as you aided us with contributions you sent a little time previously (πρὸ ὀλίγου καιροῦ)—which proved to be an encouragement for the City and aid for the Christians and for the Great Church [i.e., the Patriarchate of Constantinople]—you might thus again (πάλιν) send some of your own [money] and some of the joint contributions of other Christians and might aid us, who are under the constraint of the blockade and of the struggle with the enemies pressing upon us.'⁵

It is clear from these words that before this *pittakion* was written, the Byzantine authorities, in the fairly recent past, had sent two embassies to Russia for the purpose of raising funds, and that at least one of them had been dispatched by Manuel II and the Patriarch Matthew. The latter embassy, moreover, had not yet returned by the time the patriarchal *pittakion* was written, since the envoy who was to carry it to Russia in 1400 was instructed to collaborate (συνδράμῃ) and join forces with (ἐνωθῇ) his predecessors, so that 'they may bear it [i.e., the contribution] here posthaste, for we are in great need'.⁶ This embassy might have been dispatched at any time between Matthew's elevation to the Patriarchate (November 1397)⁷ and December 1399.⁸

the Russians. The Turkish siege of Constantinople lasted from 1394 to 1402. See J. W. Barker, *Manuel II Palaeologus (1391–1425): A Study in Late Byzantine Statesmanship* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1969), pp. 123–99, 479–81.

4. It has been translated into Russian by A. S. Pavlov (*Pamyatniki drevne-russkogo kanonicheskogo prava: Russkaya Istoricheskaya Biblioteka*, VI (St. Petersburg, 1880), appendices, pp. 311–16) and into English by J. W. Barker (op. cit., pp. 202–4).

5. In the main, I follow Barker's translation.

6. *MM*, II, p. 360.

7. See Barker, op. cit., p. 211, n. 15.

8. F. Dölger, who dates the letter entrusted to this embassy to between 1397

However, the statement in the *pittakion* that the events of December 1399 took place some time after (μετὰ παραδρομὴν καιροῦ ἱκανοῦ)⁹ the Byzantine envoys left Constantinople suggests that they embarked on their mission before 1399. As for the first of the two embassies mentioned by the Patriarch, we can probably accept Dölger's dating of 1397–8, based on Russian chronicles.¹⁰ One of these, the *Nikonovskaya Letopis'*, states that 'alms for those who are in such need and misery' were collected not only in Muscovy, but also in Tver', Ryazan' and Lithuania.¹¹

This chronology suggests that in the space of a little more than two years the Byzantine authorities despatched no less than three embassies to Russia, to seek financial aid. The intensity of this diplomatic activity, conducted while Constantinople was besieged by the Turks, should not surprise us: at that very time Manuel II was sending embassy after embassy to western Europe, to seek help for the defence of Constantinople: one was sent in July 1397 to Charles VI of France, two, in the course of 1398, were dispatched to Richard II of England.¹² Russia offered the Byzantines an added opportunity for fund raising: a permanent and prestigious collecting agent was available on the spot, in the person of the primate of the Russian Church; and when this primate was the Metropolitan Cyprian, a man trained by the late Patriarch Philotheos and so devoted to the interests of the Empire that the Patriarch Matthew, in this same *pittakion*, extolled his former services to Byzantium and described him as a φιλορρώμαιος ἄνθρωπος,¹³ the prospects of tapping the

and December 1399 (*Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches*, V (Munich, 1965), p. 85, no. 3268), mistakenly identifies its principal secular addressee as Prince Dimitri Donskoy. Dimitri had died in 1389, and was succeeded by his son Basil I (1389–1425).

9. *MM*, II, p. 359.

10. Dölger, *Regesten*, no. 3267.

11. *Polnoe Sobranie Russkikh Letopisey*, XI (Moscow, 1965), p. 168; in the *Troitskaya Letopis'* there is no mention of Ryazan' or Lithuania: M. D. Priselkov, *Troitskaya Letopis'* (Moscow–Leningrad, 1950), p. 448.

12. See D. M. Nicol, 'A Byzantine Emperor in England: Manuel II's Visit to London in 1400–1401', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, XII, 2 (1970), pp. 205–6.

13. *MM*, II, pp. 360–1: ἀδελφὲ ἀγαπητὲ, εἴπερ ἄλλοτε ἠγωνίσω, ὡς φιλορρώμαιος ἄνθρωπος, ἀγωνίσθητι νῦν καὶ δίδασον καὶ παραίνεσον καὶ

resources of the church as well as of the different principalities must have seemed doubly attractive.

A noteworthy feature of the *pittakion* is the emphasis which the Patriarch lays on the reconciliation recently effected between Manuel II and John VII, and the length to which he goes to assure Cyprian (and through him the Russian secular authorities) that John is taking seriously his duty of defending Constantinople against the Turks, and to warn them against listening to uninformed gossip suggesting the contrary.¹⁴ The reasons for these protestations are not hard to find: John VII's reputation is unlikely to have stood very high in Russia; indeed, a crowned emperor who, only a few years ago, had served as a willing tool of the Sultan Bayazid in the latter's designs on Constantinople¹⁵ and had offered (in 1397) to sell his rights to the Byzantine throne to the King of France,¹⁶ could scarcely be regarded by the Russians as a reliable pillar to support the tottering Empire.¹⁷ No wonder that, faced with the urgent need to collect money from the Russians for the defence of Constantinople, the Patriarch sought to reassure them that, with Manuel II departed to seek aid in the West, his nephew and junior partner, John VII, had mended his ways and now attended 'to all matters concerning the guarding and safety of the City and of the Christians'.

The most interesting feature of our *pittakion*, however, are the successive changes in the character of the embassy charged with carrying it to Russia. The Patriarchate's original intention had

συμβούλευσον ἀπασιν, ἵνα ποιήσωσι, καθὼς εἰσηγοῦμεθα καὶ ἀξιοῦμεν. Barker has, I believe, mistranslated *ἐπερ ἄλλοτε ἠγωνίσω* as 'if indeed you ever exerted yourself' (op. cit., p. 203). The meaning is surely 'even though you exerted yourself in the past'.

14. Ibid., p. 360.

15. See Barker, op. cit., p. 139, n. 28; D. M. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium* (London, 1972), p. 302.

16. Barker, op. cit., p. 164.

17. The Russian pilgrim, Archimandrite Ignatius of Smolensk, who was in Constantinople from June 1389 to February 1392, writes with manifest disapproval of John VII's attempts, which began in 1390, 'to seek the rule of Constantinople with Turkish aid': 'Khozhdenie Ignatiya Smolyanina', ed. S. V. Arsen'ev, *Pravoslavny Palestinsky Sbornik*, IV, 3 (St. Petersburg, 1887), p. 12; G. P. Majeska, *The Journey of Ignatius of Smolensk to Constantinople* (1389–92) (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University), pp. 15, 100.

been to entrust the *pittakion* to a 'letter-bearer' (πιττακοφόρον), presumably a clerical official of fairly humble status. But, writes the Patriarch, 'for your greater honour (διὰ τιμὴν ὑμετέραν πλείονα) we have chosen and we are sending, as our emissary, the most reverend Archbishop of Bethlehem . . . , a man well-known in your region and a friend of Your Reverence'.¹⁸ This distinguished personage, chosen to lead the 1400 embassy to Russia, was a figure of central importance in the East European policy of the Byzantine Patriarchate and government during the last decade of the fourteenth century. Michael, Archbishop of Bethlehem, had on two previous occasions been sent on important missions to Eastern Europe. In 1393, in the company of Alexios Aaron, an *oikeios* of the Emperor Manuel II,¹⁹ he was dispatched by the Patriarch Antony IV to Moscow, with instructions pertaining to the political relations between Muscovy and Byzantium, the chronic insubordination of the Novgorodians, and the affairs of the Galician and Moldavian churches.²⁰ In 1397 Michael of Bethlehem went to Moldavia, Galicia and, presumably, to Muscovy as well, as an envoy both of the Patriarch and of the Emperor, charged with clearing up the tangled ecclesiastical affairs of the first two of these countries and with negotiating with Jagiełło, the King of Poland, on matters which may well have included the plan for the union of the Greek and Latin Churches and the organization of an anti-Turkish crusade for the salvation of Constantinople.²¹ There is no doubt that Michael was an experienced diplomatist and an *homme de confiance* both of the Byzantine Patriarchate and of the

18. *MM*, II, p. 360.

19. For Alexios Aaron, see *Prosopographisches Lexikon der Palaiologenzeit*, ed. E. Trapp and others, I (Vienna, 1976), p. 1. On the *oikeioi* in late Byzantine society, see J. Verpeaux, 'Les "oikeioi"'. Notes d'histoire institutionnelle et sociale', *REB*, XXIII (1965), 89–99; G. Weiss, *Joannes Kantakuzenos—Aristokrat, Staatsmann, Kaiser und Mönch—in der Gesellschaftsentwicklung von Byzanz im 14. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden, 1969), pp. 143–5 and *passim*; Lj. Maksimović, *Vizantijska provincijska uprava u doba Paleologa* (Belgrade, 1972), pp. 14–15, 18–19, 33, 35, 117.

20. *MM*, II, pp. 171–2, 177–97; J. Darrouzès, *Le Registre synodal*, p. 125, nos. 24, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37. Cf. I. P. Medvedev, 'Reviziya vizantiiskikh dokumentov na Rusi v kontse XIV v.', *Vspomogatel'nye istoricheskie dissipliny*, VII (Leningrad, 1976), 289–97.

21. *MM*, II, pp. 278–85.

imperial government. He was a close friend and admirer of the Metropolitan Cyprian,²² who was by birth a Bulgarian; he enjoyed the confidence of the rulers of several East European countries; and the testimony of the Patriarch Antony makes it virtually certain that he knew at least one Slavonic language.²³

Michael's appointment to head the mission to Russia in 1400 was not, however, the last change in the composition of this extraordinary embassy. An incomplete marginal note in the manuscript of the *pittakion*, reproduced by Miklosich and Müller, can be reconstructed to read: 'This was cancelled, although it was translated, and another [letter] was sent instead of this one, and there were sent to Kiev as envoys [the archbishop of] Bethlehem, Raoul and Kantakouzenos'.²⁴

We have no means of telling how much of the extant *pittakion* was 'cancelled', for the final version is not extant. There are signs of carelessness in the wording of the marginal note.²⁵ The fact that it had been translated into Slavonic suggests that the

22. φίλος σός ἐνι καὶ ἐπαινέτης σου . . . πολλὰ γὰρ σὲ ἀγαπᾷ καὶ ἐπαινεῖ καὶ θαυμάζεται: *MM*, II, p. 284.

23. μάλιστα δὲ ἦν ἔχει μετ' αὐτῶν κοινωνίαν καὶ οἰκειότητα ἀπὸ τῆς ἰδίας διαλέκτου καὶ γλώττης καὶ ἄλλως δὲ γνώριμον ὄντα καὶ φίλον οὐ τοῖς ἐκεῖ μόνον ἀρχουσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῷ λοιπῷ σχεδὸν λαῷ ἀπαντι: *MM*, II, p. 278. The people with whom Archbishop Michael is said to have 'a community and a kinship in dialect and language' are, as the context shows, the inhabitants of 'Mavrovlachia' (i.e. Moldavia) and Galicia. Though we cannot exclude the possibility that the local language known to Michael was Rumanian, it seems more likely to have been one of the Slavonic languages—Polish, Ukrainian or Russian. The Moldavians, it should be recalled, who were soon (in 1401) to be given a separate metropolitanate by the Byzantine authorities, used Church Slavonic as their liturgical language. The wording of the Patriarch's statement does not, in my opinion, justify the belief that Archbishop Michael was himself of either Slavonic or Rumanian descent.

24. *MM*, II, p. 359. The note has been reconstructed as follows by Darroutzès, *Le Registre synodal*, p. 132, note 41: <Το>ὔτο ἤργησε <μ>ὲν μετεφρά<σθ>η δὲ καὶ ἐγρά<φ>ησαν ἄλλα <ἀν>τὶ τούτων καὶ <ἐ>στάλησαν εἰς Κύ<εβ>ον ἀποκρισάρι<οι>[sic] ὁ Βηθλεέμ, <ὁ P>αοὺλ καὶ ὁ Καν<τα>κουζηνός. Barker (op. cit., p. 204, n. 4) erroneously identifies ὁ Βηθλεέμ and ὁ 'Ραοὺλ and mistranslates 'Raoul of Bethlehem'. For a palaeographical description of the manuscript, see Darroutzès, op. cit., p. 81, and *ibid.*, p. 455 for a photographic reproduction of the relevant folio.

25. E.g. the simultaneous use of the singular and the plural to describe the *pittakion*, and the improbable reference to Kiev as the embassy's point of destination, doubtless inspired by the opening words of the document: 'Ἱερῶτατε μητροπολίτα Κυέβου καὶ πάσης 'Ρωσίας.

changes in the text were introduced at a late stage;²⁶ and it may well be that the most substantial of these changes was the addition of Raoul and Kantakouzenos to the embassy's personnel.²⁷

It is, in my view, possible to identify these two personages. 'Raoul' is in all probability Constantine Rhales Palaiologos, a relative of the Emperor Manuel II, who between 1403 and 1409 was the emperor's envoy in Spain and France, charged with collecting financial aid for the defence of Constantinople. Martin I, King of Aragon, at the behest of Charles VI of France, had promised to provide aid to Constantinople; an enterprise which, it was hoped, would be facilitated by the sale of indulgences decreed for the same purpose in the Aragonese lands by the Avignonese anti-pope Benedict XIII. But things did not go as smoothly as was hoped: the Spaniards showed themselves less than enthusiastic when it came to disbursing funds; and there were cases of scandalous misappropriation of collected moneys. In an effort to break this deadlock, Manuel II, then on his homeward journey from Paris, sent in 1403 his relative, Constantine Rhales Palaiologos, as his ambassador to Aragon. During the next few years we find Constantine, at times accompanied by his son Theodore, in Aragon, Catalonia, Navarre and France.²⁸ However, as a fund-collector he seems to have been somewhat ineffective, for in 1409 Manuel II revoked his prerogatives and replaced him as chief fund-raiser in

26. For this reason I find it difficult to accept Darrouzès' description of the extant text as 'une minute préparatoire' (p. 132, n. 41).

27. A second marginal note, of no great substance, refers to the agreement between Manuel II and John VII: *MM*, II, p. 360; Darrouzès, *op. cit.*, p. 132, n. 41; Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 204, n. 4.

28. In a document issued in Barcelona on 25 September 1404, King Martin describes 'Contastinus Rali et Theodorus Rali eius filius Paleologii' as 'affines et ambassaiatores excellentissimi imperatoris Contastinopolis': *Diplomatari de l'Orient Català (1301-1409)*, ed. A. Rubió i Lluch (Barcelona, 1947), p. 702; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 697, 703, 709. Cf. C. Marinesco, 'Du nouveau sur les relations de Manuel II Paléologue (1391-1425) avec l'Espagne', *Atti dello VIII Congresso Internazionale di studi bizantini* (Palermo 3-10 Aprile 1951), I (Rome, 1953), pp. 420-36; S. Cirac Estopañan, *Bizancio y España. La unión, Manuel II Paleólogo y sus recuerdos en España* (Barcelona, 1952), pp. 54-9, 122; Barker, *op. cit.*, pp. 255-7; S. Fassoulakis, *The Byzantine Family of Raoul-Ral(les)* (Athens, 1973), pp. 66-7, no. 53; Dölger, *Regesten*, V, p. 90, nos. 3297, 3298.

France by the celebrated scholar and diplomatist, Manuel Chrysoloras.²⁹ We know nothing of the early career of Constantine Rhales Palaiologos. But the type of work he performed as Manuel II's envoy in Spain between 1403 and 1409 makes it highly probable that he was the 'Raoul' who was sent in 1400 to collect funds in Russia.³⁰

The Kantakouzenos of the marginal note can likewise be identified without much difficulty. He is no doubt Theodore Palaiologos Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenus), 'uncle' (θεῖος) of the Emperor Manuel II, who on 1 July 1397 was sent by Manuel to King Charles VI of France, bearing a letter requesting help for besieged Constantinople and describing the dangers which the Christian world would face if the Byzantine capital were to fall. On 27 December 1398 he was made a citizen of Venice. He died in 1410.³¹ In his letter to Charles VI Manuel II describes Theodore as 'ambassiatozem nostrum strenuum et desideratissimum avunculum, imperii nostri nobilem et

29. J. Berger de Xivrey, 'Mémoire sur la vie et les ouvrages de l'empereur Manuel Paléologue', *Mémoires de l'Institut de France*, XIX (1853), p. 152. Cf. C. Marinesco, op. cit., pp. 434–5.

30. 'Ραούλ, the older form of the name (a contraction of Rudolfus or Rodulfus), continued to be used as late as the seventeenth century; in Constantinople it was preserved as late as the end of the fourteenth. By the middle of the fourteenth century, however, it begins to appear frequently in its hellenized form 'Ράλλης (later 'Ράλλης). See Fassoulakis, op. cit., pp. 4–5. In a document issued by the Byzantine Patriarchate in October 1399, the same person is referred to forty-eight times as δ 'Ραούλ (*MM*, II, pp. 304–12), and only once (p. 309) as δ 'Ράλλης. Two other candidates for identification with δ 'Ραούλ of the marginal note might be considered. The first is Constantine's son, Theodore Rhales Palaiologos. He accompanied his father on the mission to Spain, where he apparently remained until 1410: *Diplomatari de l'Orient Català*, pp. 702, 703, 709; Marinesco, op. cit., p. 433; Barker, op. cit., p. 256; Fassoulakis, op. cit., p. 67, no. 54. However, as a younger man and a less experienced diplomat, he would have cut a less impressive figure than his father in the Russian embassy of 1400. This is not an adequate reason for eliminating the son: yet the father remains the stronger candidate.

Another possible, but far less convincing, candidate is Manuel (Palaiologos) Raoul or Rales, mentioned (forty-nine times) in the above-mentioned document of the Patriarchate of 1399: *MM*, II, pp. 304–12, cf. Fassoulakis, op. cit., pp. 56–7, no. 41. Though an οἰκεῖος of the Emperor Manuel II, he seems, by comparison with the two professional diplomats cited above, a somewhat marginal figure.

31. Dölger, *Regesten*, V, p. 85, no. 3269; D. M. Nicol, *The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenus) ca. 1100–1460. A Genealogical and Prosopographical*

circumspectum virum atque sapientem et expertum'.³² The precise degree of relationship between Manuel II and Theodore Palaiologos Kantakouzenos is disputed.³³ There is no doubt that the term *θεῖος* was frequently used, particularly in the late Byzantine period, in the sense of 'cousin'.³⁴ Whatever his exact relationship to the emperor, Theodore Palaiologos Kantakouzenos was clearly a person of standing in Byzantine society; and Hunger rightly describes him as a 'grand seigneur'.³⁵

It would be interesting to know whether the concluding section of the existing draft was incorporated into the final version of the *pittakion*. It contains a remarkable statement. In the interest of his fund-raising campaign, the Metropolitan Cyprian was to assure his Russian flock that it was more important to contribute money for the defence of Constantinople 'than to perform works of charity, to give alms to the poor, and to redeem prisoners. . . . For this holy City is the pride, the support, the sanctification and the glory of the Christians in the whole inhabited world'.³⁶

Study (Washington, D.C., 1968), pp. 165–6; H. Hunger, *Johannes Chortasmenos* (ca. 1370–ca. 1436/37). *Briefe, Gedichte und Kleine Schriften. Einleitung, Regesten, Prosopographie, Text* (Wiener Byzantinistische Studien, VII [Vienna, 1969]), pp. 106–7. Barker, op. cit., pp. 154–7.

32. Barker, op. cit., p. 155, 488–9.

33. Hunger (*Johannes Chortasmenos*, pp. 106–7) believes that Theodore was the son of the co-emperor Matthew Kantakouzenos and thus Manuel II's first cousin. Nicol is sceptical, and points out that there is no real evidence that Matthew had a son named Theodore ('The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos. Some Addenda and Corrigenda', *DOP*, XXVII (1973), 312–13). Nicol does, however, accept that Hunger was right to reject his earlier identification of the emperor's relative with another Theodore Kantakouzenos, who is described by Demetrios Kydonas as Manuel's *φίλος*, and who helped Manuel to defend Thessalonica against the Turks. Cf. G. T. Dennis, 'The Reign of Manuel II Palaeologos in Thessalonica, 1382–1387' (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, CLIX [Rome, 1960]), pp. 71–2, n. 52.

34. See St. Binon, 'A propos d'un prostagma inédit d'Andronic III Paléologue', *BZ*, XXXVIII (1938), 146–55; V. Laurent, 'Le Vaticanus Latinus 4789. Histoire et alliances des Cantacuzènes aux XIVe–XVe siècles', *REB*, IX (1952), 82.

35. Hunger, *Johannes Chortasmenos*, p. 107.

36. *MM*, II, p. 361. The word used for 'works of charity' is *λειτουργίας*; both Pavlov and Barker (see n. 4, above) mistranslate it as 'liturgies'.

In the last resort the most curious feature of the Byzantine mission to Russia in 1400 is its personnel. The last-minute addition of Constantine Rhales Palaiologos and of Theodore Palaiologos Kantakouzenos, both relatives of the Emperor Manuel II and high-ranking officials of the Empire, transformed a conventional fund-raising operation, to be carried out by ecclesiastics, into a Grand Embassy. What were the reasons for this transformation? Was the Empire, whose capital lay under siege, so desperately in need of money that its government threw in its most qualified and prestigious diplomatists, in an attempt to obtain from Russia as much money as possible, and in the shortest possible time? Or were these two members of the imperial family, together with the archbishop of Bethlehem, who was an old hand at East European affairs, given some other, and more secret, commission? Unless new evidence comes to light, we shall never know.

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